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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	CTME-00	DODE-00	EB-00	E-00
	VC1-00	FRB-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCIE-00
	NSAE-00	ISN-00	NSCE-00	OES-00	OIC-00	OMB-00	PA-00
	PM-00	PRS-00	P-00	ISNE-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	STR-00	SVC-00	TRSE-00	T-00	BBG-00	IIP-00	PMB-00
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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0281
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI
ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L HO CHI MINH CITY 000072

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SUBJECT: PROBLEMS WITH RETURNEE TREATMENT IN KONTUM PROVINCE

REF: HCMC 53

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Silberstein, Political Officer, ConGen
HCMC, State Department.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

CLASSIFIED BY: Consul General Seth Winnick for reason: 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary: The visit of a joint Hanoi/HCMC team to Kontum Province's Sa Thay district revealed problems with treatment of at least some ethnic minority returnees from Cambodia. Although we were promised free access to returnees and their families in their homes, in practice the plainclothes police presence was intense and intimidating to the villagers. Three of the five returnees were "away." However, family members either stated or suggested that at least a few of the returnees had been mistreated, giving us the sense that absent returnees did not want to meet out of fear of repercussions. Poverty, dissatisfaction and fear were worse in Sa Thay district than we have seen in any of our recent visits to Central Highlands. Reftel reports on results of the returnee-monitoring visit to Gia Lai province. End Summary.

Returnees in Kontum Province

12. (SBU) On January 12, Hanoi and HCMC PolOffs traveled to Sa Thay district in Kontum province to assess the conditions for ethnic minority returnees. A clearly nervous Sa Thay District People's Committee Chairman -- himself an ethnic minority Jarai -- assured us that they would receive private and unfettered access to six ethnic minority returnees from Cambodia. These individuals had a "low education" and were "lured" to go. The returnees had realized their mistake and "apologized to the community" upon return.

13. (SBU) The district Chairman maintained that Kontum had made great strides in improving the welfare of ethnic minority groups in the province. In 2001 there was widespread ethnic minority unrest in Kontum, but protests were much more subdued in 2004. There was "no religion" in the district, he said. The Chairman confirmed that 14 ethnic minority individuals were arrested in recent months for attempting to flee to Cambodia. Two individuals who had fled to Cambodia following the 2001 protests and subsequently returned were the ringleaders. He provided no other details and concluded that the 14 would be dealt with "under the law."

Ia Grak Village Elder

14. (C) In the presence of provincial and district officials and what subsequently turned out to be undercover policemen, the ethnic Jarai village elder told us that the 78 Jarai households in the village had more than enough land -- at a minimum one hectare (2.47 acres) and government support to make a good living. Those who had fled -- including his cousin and son-in-law (in 2001) -- were "lazy." In addition to the Jarai, there was a sizeable ethnic Vietnamese and ethnic Thai migrant population from the north. The government ensured that everyone had enough land. At least one-quarter of the households in the village were Protestant. All the returnees were well treated, the elder asserted. Ethnic Vietnamese own the village general store and repair shop.

Status of the Returnees

15. (C) Meeting with the wife of voluntary returnee Siu Son (MTN-538), the village elder and two other ethnic Jarai male "neighbors," joined the meeting. Also in the room were two other women and their children. Extremely nervous and anxious, Son's wife signaled that she could not talk to us so long as the elder the other men were present. After some discussion, the three left, at which time she explained that the two men accompanying the elder were plainclothes policeman who were responsible for the arrests of the husbands of the other women present in the room as well as six other men in the village. These eight individuals had been arrested two months earlier for attempting to cross the border to Cambodia. The women had not seen or heard of their husbands since the arrests.

16. (C) Mrs. Son said that her husband had just left for Quang Ngai province "to visit his mother." She and her husband have no land; their one-hectare was destroyed in 2004 during her husband's absence in Cambodia, first by drought and then by flood. She also was forced to borrow two million dong (USD 120) from local Vietnamese to tide her over during her husband's absence. They now owe six million dong. Without land of their own, they now work the one-hectare owned by her mother as well as perform occasional day labor. Siu Son graduated from the ninth grade. They had received no assistance since his return from Cambodia in early 2005. They, and many others in the village, were Protestant.

17. (C) Looking from side to side to see if any police or "journalists" were near, she told us that her husband was beaten in police custody upon his return to the district. He was hit in the ribs and stomach. He remains in pain. Also upon return, he and the other returnees were put on public display in a village gathering and forced to apologize to the community. Six months ago he tried to flee again to Cambodia but was caught. He was not beaten, but was placed on six months administrative detention. Crying, Mrs. Son was extremely concerned as to what might happen if information that her husband was beaten would leak; police had made them promise not to reveal the incident to anyone, she said.

18. (C) With plainclothes police officials everywhere but inside the house, we met with Siu Su (MTN-433) in his parent's straw, mud and wood house. The home had electricity and they own a television. Su has a seventh-grade education. He used to belong to the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam, but gave it up of his own accord. He said that he went to Cambodia because he wanted to be resettled in another country. His parents own just under two hectares of land. He has received no aid from the state since his return. He told us that he had not been visited by police since his return. He was not threatened or hit, but remained fearful of future repercussions from his Cambodia crossing.

19. (C) Ksor Ngay (MTN-435) greeted us in his decrepit tin-roofed home. Initially he told us that he followed "bad people" to Cambodia to make money and possibly be resettled to a third country. The family had one hectare of unirrigated fields; he and his wife also work as day laborers for "the Kinh." The family had received assistance before he left for Cambodia, but none since his return.

110. (C) Asked about abuse, Ngay initially told us that he was not hit or threatened, nor had he heard of others being abused. After we made clear that we were USG representatives, Ngay told us that he had been jailed for three days immediately after his return to the district and beaten in the cell by another ethnic Vietnamese prisoner. He claimed that he was told that if he attempted to flee again and was caught, he would be killed. He is under six months administrative detention, but has not received any other threats.

Shadow Boxing

111. (C) As we exited Ngay's house, provincial officials told us that we had seriously violated local custom by not allowing the village elder to sit in our meetings. The elder had lost face. Profuse apologies were not enough; were we not to allow him access, the elder would terminate our visit. Hoping to at least see the final two returnees, we agreed that the elder -- but no one else -- could join. Through a combination of gestures, nods and veiled comments the elder subsequently indicated he was forced to make a scene, was dissatisfied with how the Jarai villagers were being treated and signaled to us whenever plainclothes police were near.

More No Shows

112. (C) Neither Kapu Klanh (MTN-412), his wife or his four children were present when we called at their ramshackle, home, which does not have electricity. His mother, who lives next door, let us in, but was very nervous as plainclothes police were loitering on the doorstep. She claimed that authorities

gave the family "money, rice, lots of things," but would not specify when or what exactly. She said that "she did not know" if her son had been beaten or threatened by local authorities. She would not say any more.

113. (C) Siu Phong (MTN-427) also was "out." His mother and sister told us that Phong had just moved back to Ia Grak village from a neighboring town. He helps the family farm their two hectares of cassava. His mother said, "she did not know" how Phong was treated or if he had received aid since his return. His sister added that he had been sick since his return, but still works the fields. She then quietly slipped into poloff's pocket a two-page document from the Kontum public prosecutor's office, detailing the case against the 14 men arrested for illegal border crossing.

Comment

114. (C) The visit to Kontum suggests a pattern of sustained threat and intimidation against the returnees. More broadly, the situation in Sa Thay is the worst we have seen in our many visits to the Central Highlands. The poverty was profound and the sense of fear palpable. Unlike Dak Lak or Gia Lai provinces, where the vast majority of returnees were either extremely poorly educated or had ethnic separatist views, in Sa

Thay, both the educated and uneducated sought to flee. Separatism did not appear to be a significant factor in Sa Thay. The marginalization of the Jarai community, the deep poverty, lack of opportunity and government assistance, and the oppressive atmosphere understandably encouraged flight, especially as some had been resettled overseas in the past.
WINNICK

NOTE: DUAL CLASSBY/STATEMENT/REASON
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